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Lieutenant Graves At La Bourse

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LIEUTENANT GRAVES AT LA BOURSE

Face flat to the mud-earth, a soldier sleeps. But no. You see, clear as a flare in darkness, a block

of saturated beige:
his moist foot, bare against the ground. This man from Limerick removed his boot to pull—a corporal, smoking, tells you—the trigger

with his toe. The barrel, he says, was just a cigar in his mouth. Tomorrow,

billeted in La Bourse, the monsieur’s daughter lifts her gray skirt, unwashed for weeks. You turn your eyes to the field of poppies, silver in the full moon. She insists. She holds the raised pleat with small hands that remind you of soft dough.

There is a long gash, purple, across her smooth thigh. She bends to let the cotton fall to her ankles. You begin to walk—The Germans, their shells, you say. They cut down the poplars like rows of spring tulips.